

USA TODAY OPINION

Our view: Gun lobby aids Mexican gangs

[Martin Johnson](#) had a nice little business going in 2008 and 2009. He'd leave home in California and buy dozens of guns in Arizona, where the gun laws are much looser, using an Arizona driver's license to pretend that he still lived there. Back in California, Johnson sold the guns to his neighbor, a convicted felon who couldn't legally buy guns at all. The neighbor sold some of the guns to his buddies, none of whom was a legal buyer, either.

Federal agents caught on, thanks to a 1975 regulation designed to flag straw buyers like Johnson. Stores must report when anyone buys two or more handguns within five days.

Now the Obama administration is expanding the regulation to require gun stores in the four states along the Mexican border — California, Arizona, [New Mexico](#) and Texas — to begin reporting multiple sales of certain military style rifles, including AK-47s and AR-15s. These assault weapons are prized by drug cartels in Mexico, where tens of thousands of firearms, illegal to buy in Mexico, have been smuggled from the U.S., fueling the horrific violence that has killed some 40,000 people in the past five years.

This is a perfectly sensible idea, but predictably, the [National Rifle Association](#) and its congressional allies are trying to kill the new rule, which goes into effect on Sunday. The NRA, which filed suit last week to block the rule, charges that it is another sinister move by administration officials to "pursue their gun control agenda."

Oh, please. Even minimal gun regulation, such as closing the infamous gun show loophole or cracking down on rogue gun dealers, is low on Democrats' agendas these days. This new rule is just a common-sense step to address an obvious problem.

Protests against the regulation are hollow. An onerous burden for gun stores? Dealers have been filing reports on multiple sales of handguns for 36 years, and they know how to do it with little fuss.

An intrusion on the rights of law-abiding gun buyers? Enthusiasts who regularly purchase multiple guns report they've never been visited by federal agents, and the [Bureau of Alcohol](#) , Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) stays plenty busy with real targets, such as unemployed young buyers who spend thousands of dollars to buy dozens of copies of the same gun.

The NRA questions whether the U.S. is the source of drug cartels' guns, but some of the best proof that guns are moving from U.S. stores to Mexico is a botched ATF operation the NRA loudly criticized. " [Fast and Furious](#) " was designed to catch not just straw buyers but the drug cartel higher-ups employing them. The agency failed to track roughly 2,000 guns it knew were being bought illegally, and many of them ended up in Mexico — including two at the scene of a shootout where a [U.S. Border Patrol](#) agent was killed.

There's no excuse for the bungling that let Fast and Furious spiral out of control. But that shouldn't give the agency's critics a license to ignore the hard, dangerous work federal agents do every day to try to keep guns out of the hands of people who the law says cannot have them.